

Newsweek

Editor's note: The following email from U.S. Special Operations Command was obtained by Newsweek. To better protect our sources, we have copied the following information from the Defense Department email into this document. All redactions were made by Newsweek editorial.

From: "Thomas, Raymond A GEN USSOCOM SOCOM CDR"

<Raymond.Thomas [REDACTED]>

Date: Wednesday, December 12, 2018 8:26 AM

To: "SOF-ALL" <[REDACTED]>

Subject: Subject: Ethics and Our SOF Culture - A Call To Action

SOCOM Teammates,

Our Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and I are sending out the attached cosigned guidance on ethics for everyone in the command. It is focused on our Special Operations community and builds on ethics guidance provided by the Secretary of Defense.

Trust - among teammates and especially with our Nation - is our currency in Special Operations...we trade on it every day. We have strived long and hard over many years of combat to earn it. We will not allow inexcusable and reprehensible violations of that trust to erode decades of honorable service, teamwork and progress by the members of USSOCOM.

But a broader review of events across USSOCOM make this guidance timely and give it greater urgency. A survey of allegations of serious misconduct across our formations over the last year indicate that USSOCOM faces a deeper challenge of a disordered view of the Team and the Individual in our SOF culture.

The team - a small number of committed and capable Americans held together by tight bonds forged by shared mission and risk,

victories and sorrows - is rightly a celebrated aspect of service in SOF. But the Team is not of ultimate value. The Team exists to serve a higher purpose -to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. When the Team becomes ultimate in our values system, our identity becomes distorted and ultimately corrosive to everything we hold dear.

The Individual is also highly valued in SOF because victory demands individual skill and force of will in the face of adversity. But the Individual is also not of ultimate value. When each of us volunteered to serve America in uniform, we placed our individual well-being and value beneath that of the defense of our Constitution and the lives and liberties of our fellow Americans.

Left unchecked, a disordered value system threatens to erode the trust of our fellow comrades, our senior leaders, and ultimately the American people. Correcting this trend will take committed leadership at all levels of our command and personal moral courage by all. No component or command has escaped this trend and all of us will feel the disproportionate and negative impacts of these incidents on our mission and our people. For this reason, I am calling all of us to rapid and focused action to begin to identify and address the underlying causes, to prevent further erosion of trust in our force, and to ultimately produce a more effective special operations force for our Nation.

In response to these trends, USSOCOM will undertake the following actions:

Beginning on 1 Jan 2019, we will execute a 90-day focus period on core values and their role in our SOF culture by the following actions: * USSOCOM training and education commands and institutes will review programs of instruction for opportunities to address core values in SOF culture in ways that will impact our formations, to include values-based decision-making and reinforcement of moral courage. This includes all assessment and selection venues for SOF personnel as well as SOF-specific

training for non-SOF personnel assigned to USSOCOM.

- * USSOCOM will review all command climate survey results within the last year to identify any trends across the force rooted or impacted by SOF culture.
- * Commanders and SEAs (O5-level and above) will conduct personal and direct engagement with their personnel on the SOF cultural climate and report their observations up the chain of command. Components and operational commands will consolidate these reports and provide them to me along with proposed corrective action plans to address deficiencies.

- * USSOCOM will pursue additional research into the connection and correlation between operational trauma and behavioral health.

This guidance is in addition to actions required to support the standing NDAA Section 1066 requirement for the Department to review the ethics and professionalism programs of USSOCOM and the military departments for officers and other military personnel serving in SOF.

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With respect to individual cases, if substantiated through our military justice system, these allegations represent a violation of the trust and standards required of all service members, but most especially special operations forces. Furthermore, the serious allegations concerning our personnel are being discussed in the media, Congress, and the American public. The distraction, speculation and divisiveness created by these allegations increase the Ask to our colleagues and the mission. As SOF professionals, we must all see this as a call to self-reflection, to consider who we are, what we stand for, and what we represent.

We must stand together and resist divisiveness stoked by private and public speculation without the benefit of the facts. USSOCOM is an inherently joint force. Our service SOF components' capabilities provide the Nation with a comprehensive arsenal to defend our liberties and we have a long tradition of working together. Trust and mutual respect must remain our hallmark.

GEN Thomas